

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today the House of Representatives approved a farm bill with unprecedented levels of funding for specialty crops, nutrition and conservation, a goal that Rep. Sam Farr (D-Carmel) has led his House colleagues toward for years.

The legislation is a boon to Central Coast farmers and a vote for a more healthy United States. The "Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act of 2007" passed by a vote of 231-191.

The farm bill is reauthorized every five years, offering a slate of mandatory and authorized funding for a broad range of programs. Specialty crops, so vital to California's economy and our nation's health, have been largely left out of previous farm bills. This year, a compromise was reached that will send \$1.6 billion to specialty crops over the next five years.

Specialty crop funding:

- Produce food safety grants: \$25 million
- Specialty Crop Block Grants: \$365 million
- Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program: \$350 million
- Pest Detection and Surveillance: \$200 million
- Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops: \$38 million
- Specialty Crop Research Initiative: \$215 million
- Organic cost share and data collection: \$25 million

The House version of the bill will be reconciled with the Senate version, then sent to the president. President Bush has threatened to veto the bill.

Rep. Farr offered the following statement:

"For the first time ever, conservationists, health advocates and fruit and vegetable farmers are all excited about the farm bill. This bill offers increased funding for a multitude of priorities.

"Californians should be especially excited. This farm bill moves policy toward California, a state that has become an agricultural powerhouse with very little help from the federal

government.

“The good news for farmers is the increase in market share for specialty crops like lettuce, artichokes and broccoli. This means there will be greater opportunities for healthier foods to reach our schools, centers for health and urban communities that too often rely on unhealthy, processed foods.

“The bill also recognizes that agriculture is closely interrelated with responsible land use and water practices. You can't separate agriculture from good land practice. It's vital that farm policy takes conservation into account, and this bill does that.

“I want to make special note of the \$25 million in mandatory spending for produce food safety grants included in this bill. As ground zero for the spinach E. coli outbreak last year, the Central Coast understands all too well what happens when the food system breaks down. This investment in mandatory research will help to provide us with the necessary knowledge and understanding so we never have to go through this kind of outbreak again.”

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